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PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/13/2015
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS COMMUNITY EXPRESSES GENERAL
SATISFACTION WITH LATEST WHITE HOUSE STATEMENT

Classified By: CDA Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b)/(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Human rights activists in general reacted positively to the December 10 White House statement calling for Syrian Government to release all prisoners of conscience, including the six remaining Damascus Spring detainees, as well as Kamal Labwani, Nizar Rastanawi, and Habib Saleh. However, one activist continued his pleas for statements to include Islamist suspects, while another stated her doubts that the statements will have any effect on SARG policy. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Human rights activists Anwar al-Bunni and Radwan Zyadeh expressed satisfaction with the White House statement to Poloff in separate meetings, particularly the timing and the statement's inclusion of different activists. Family members of a number of political prisoners and detainees had expressed their satisfaction with the statement to human rights activist Rezan Zeituneh, who admitted to Poloff that this support from the families had helped her overcome her initial skepticism about whether the statements might be harmful to the prisoners' well-being. Bunni noted that the statement, combined with the December 10 granting of the 2005 Reporters Without Borders Prize to Kurdish Syrian journalist Massoud Hamid, helped enormously in drawing attention to the Syrian situation on Human Rights Day. Bunni joked that he had written a statement for Human Rights Day with nearly the exact same language used by the White House but was unable to distribute it because he had no fax access. He said that it was good luck that he had not distributed it; otherwise, he would have been chastised for being too close to the USG.

¶3. (C) However, skepticism still exists among some human rights activists regarding the U.S.'s commitment to improving the situation of political prisoners and/or the ability of the USG to affect SARG policy. Human rights lawyer Haithem al-Maleh emphasized that the statements should include Islamists as well, because they make up the majority of political prisoners and detainees. He asserted that the USG was not concerned about their well-being. His associate, Salim Kheirbek, noted that the Islamists should have their fair day in an open court instead of under the opaque conditions of the Supreme State Security Court. Zeituneh, reverting to her initial skepticism, told Poloff that the USG statements were simply for the press to make it look like the USG was doing something on human rights, but doubted that such statements would have much effect on SARG policy.
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